

Representative
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DON COX

• 9th District • 2003 Session Review and Survey Results

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**News from the
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August 2003

Dear Friends,

We knew when the 2003 Legislature convened Jan. 13 that the scheduled 105-day session would be among the toughest in state history. Foremost among the challenges we faced was finding a way to bridge a \$2.7 billion budget shortfall. And while it took an extra 31 days to complete our work, we fulfilled our commitment to forge a two-year budget agreement without raising taxes.

Among our top priorities this year were protecting taxpayers by making government live within its means, finding ways to strengthen the state's business climate and create new jobs, and to reduce the burdensome bureaucracy that can stifle efforts to revitalize Washington's economy.

This session review is our report to you about how we dealt with these and other issues. It also includes the results of the questionnaire we mailed to you in February. Your responses were very helpful in guiding our decisions this session, and we appreciate your willingness to actively participate in your government.

Although the 2003 session has concluded, our responsibilities as your state legislators continue during the interim. Resolving constituent problems is a major part of our job representing you in Olympia, so please remember that we are always glad to hear from you, and always ready to lend a hand.

Sincerely,

MARK SCHOESLER
State Representative

DON COX
State Representative

Final budget quick facts

- No new taxes. The budget requires state government to live within its means.
- Home-care workers will receive a 75-cent-an-hour pay raise.
- Teachers in the first seven years of their careers will get a deserved salary increase. By the second year of the budget, starting teachers will earn \$30,000 a year.
- The budget includes \$30 million more for class-size reductions than the governor requested, boosting the per-pupil grant to \$254 per student.
- Colleges will be allowed to increase in-state undergraduate tuition by up to 7 percent in each of next two academic years.
- The state-subsidized Basic Health Plan for the working poor will provide for 100,000 people – an increase of 40,000 over the governor's proposal.
- The budget funds parks and provides for county health departments.
- The state's \$400 million windfall from the federal tax-relief bill will be kept unspent as a hedge against an expected revenue downturn later this year.

on the Basic Health Plan, and closed a \$600 million deficit in the Health Services Account.

To help retain and attract new teachers, the budget provides a pay increase for teachers in their first seven years. By the second year of the budget, beginning teachers would earn \$30,000 a year. The budget also lifts I-728 funding to \$254 per student, up from \$212.

Although the budget gives colleges and universities the authority to raise undergraduate tuition up to 7 percent, the increase is lower than the 9 percent originally proposed by the Senate. The budget is also a better package for local school districts. An earlier proposal by majority Democrats tapped heavily into funds earmarked for levy equalization.

There are parts of the agreement that everyone dislikes, and the decisions were difficult, but we never lost sight of the fact that taxpayers are hurting too. With a jobless rate that's among the highest in the country and businesses laying off employees, raising taxes would put more people out of work and further delay economic recovery.

In the end, we crafted a \$23 billion budget that represents an increase in spending of less than 2 percent over the current biennium – the slowest rate of growth in 40 years. We believe this budget will send a strong message that Washington is a good place to do business, and further the goal of stabilizing and strengthening the state's economy.

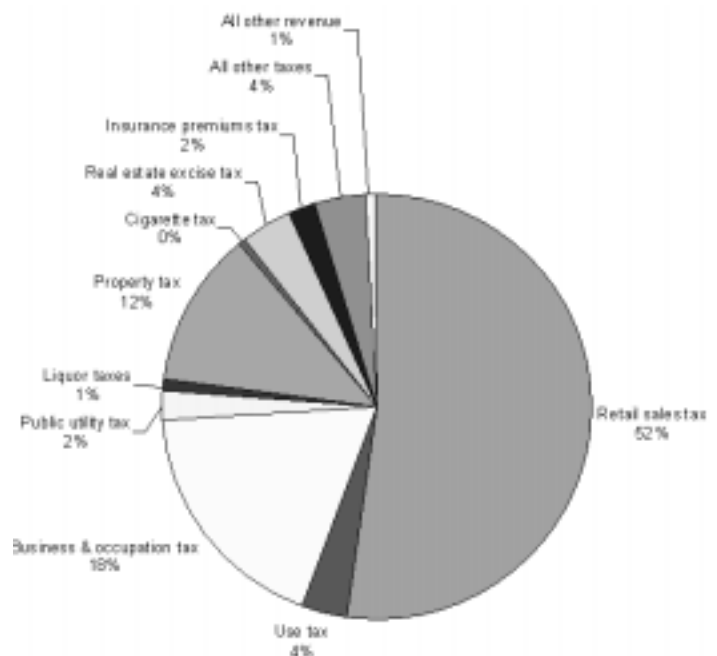
■ No new-taxes budget

The Legislature managed the state's budget crisis the way the rest of us have to do – by setting priorities and reducing spending. Through disciplined budget-writing, leadership, and a willingness to fight hard to make government live within its means, we accomplished what many people thought could not be done – bringing a spending plan together without raising taxes. Just as important, we kept faith with the voters who told us to cinch in and tackle the state's financial problems with responsibility and restraint, just as individuals, families and businesses are doing.

It is important to note that in light of severe spending constraints, the budget focuses limited resources on the most pressing priorities, including providing funding for government programs and services that vulnerable citizens depend on most.

We were able to maintain health coverage for low-income children and avoid deep reductions in services for the developmentally disabled and troubled youth. We also protected health-care coverage for 100,000 low-income citizens

**General Fund-State Revenues
2003-2005 Biennium
June 2003 Forecast, Percent of Total**



2003 Session Review and Survey Results

■ Protecting jobs and landing the Boeing 7E7

Less than 24 hours after it began, the Legislature's second special session drew to a close June 11 with passage of a major overhaul of Washington's unemployment-insurance system and approval of a 20-year tax-cut package aimed at persuading Boeing to build its proposed 7E7 jetliner in the state.

Helping position Washington as a viable contender for the 7E7 factory was important, but it was a bitter pill for many of us to see the Legislature alter the two education initiatives (because they were too expensive) and then approve a \$3 billion package of tax breaks for Boeing.

The UI fix (**Senate Bill 6097**) is a compromise proposal that revamps one of the most generous and costly unemployment insurance programs in the nation.

Boeing made it clear that reforming the system was a priority if we expected to have a chance to land the 7E7 assembly-plant project. Scaling back the system is not just about Boeing, it's also about the thousands of other businesses around the state that have to pay unemployment insurance. It's about forging a solution that offers equity and stability, and ending Washington's competitive disadvantage with other states.

Washington's unemployment insurance system costs employers nearly triple the national average. (Boeing pays \$772 per employee.) At \$327.51, the state's weekly jobless benefit is the third highest in the U.S., and claimants can draw unemployment checks for up to 30 weeks – four weeks longer than most states.

Senate Bill 6097 changes the formula for calculating benefits, basing benefits on a claimant's annual earnings, rather than the current practice of averaging the two highest quarters in the past four. The bill also trims the length of time a claimant may receive benefits from 30 weeks to 26 weeks when the unemployment rate reaches 6.8 percent or less, and ties unemployment taxes to an employer's record of laying off workers.

The bill demonstrates the Legislature's commitment to bringing balance to the unemployment insurance system by protecting workers who lose their jobs, while controlling costs for employers. This is a significant step forward in our efforts to revitalize Washington's economy and to create a more positive business environment.



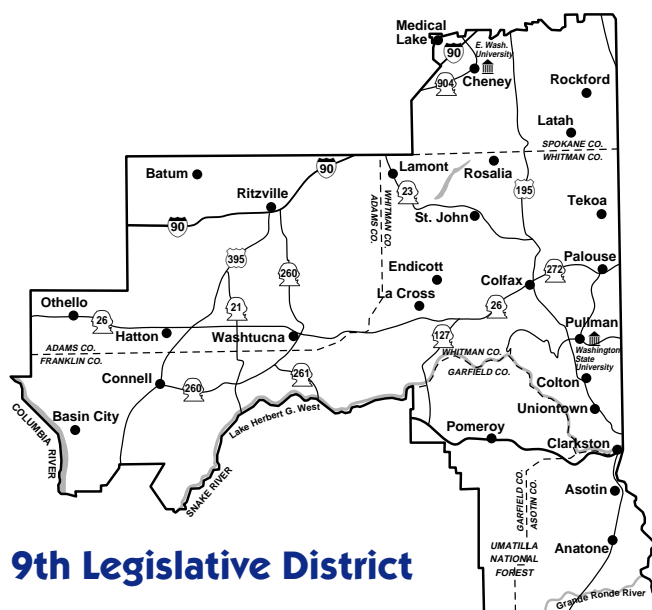
■ Progress on water rights legislation

After years of frustration, the Legislature finally moved on several bills this session to give more certainty and flexibility in water rights throughout the state.

House Bill 1338 allows cities and other public-water utilities to grow into their water rights as they expand, ensuring adequate water for future growth. Under current law, water-right holders who don't use all their allotted water run the risk of losing the right to use it in the future.

Senate Bill 5028 prohibits the state Department of Ecology from using water quality as a reason to restrict the use of a water right. The bill grew out of a case involving the Methow Valley Irrigation District (in north-central Washington) which was ordered to stop using part of its water right to protect fish. The bill was a big priority for farmers and other big water users. It protects them from the claim that taking water out of a stream (or diverting water) – and thereby raising water temperatures downstream – constitutes pollution. Under SB 5028, Ecology cannot take your water – without compensation – to solve a water-quality issue.

While we made progress in reforming some water-management laws, other common-sense issues remain unresolved, including relief from the Department of Ecology’s arcane “use-it-or-lose-it” policy (also known as relinquishment), which allows the state to confiscate water rights not used within the last five years.



■ Capital budget includes 9th District projects

The 2003-2005 capital budget authorizes \$2.57 billion in new construction, more than a third of which will go to education, including \$580 million for higher education facilities and \$400 million in matching funds for K-12 school construction. The two-year construction budget provides funding for a number of local projects important to our district, including:



- **\$35 million for Johnson Hall addition – Plant Bioscience Building – WSU**
- **\$11 million for education addition to Cleveland Hall – WSU**
- **\$3 million for new nursing building – WSU Riverpoint campus**
- **\$19 million to build Cheney Hall (computer and engineering sciences center) – EWU**
- **\$6 million for Senior Hall renovation – EWU**
- **\$1 million for visitor center and formal entry – EWU**

The infusion of construction dollars into communities around the state is expected to create more than 24,000 jobs over the next four years.



Rep. Schoesler, ranking Republican on the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, confers with a colleague during a committee hearing.

Bills sponsored this session by Rep. Schoesler:

- **House Bill 1101** – Signed by Gov. Locke April 14, the bill eliminates the 30-day limitation on forwarding grain during a grain-storage emergency. The measure provides growers with additional flexibility when there is a large crop that exceeds the capacity of a local grain warehouse.
- **House Bill 2073** – Signed May 13, the bill allows long-outdated local government records to be donated (to a museum, historical society or library) rather than being archived or destroyed.
- **House Bill 2067** – Signed May 16, the legislation establishes a Whitman County pilot program that allows rural, clustered residential developments to use public ground water where there is no municipal water supply available.
- **House Bill 1126** – Also signed into law May 16, the bill allows the state Department of Agriculture to adjust fees for lab testing and seed certification.
- **House Bill 2088** – Signed into law May 20, the bill requires local governments to reduce storm-water rates and charges by a minimum of 10 percent for new or remodeled buildings that utilize approved rainwater-harvesting systems.

■ Governor vetoes legislation to ease anti-trapping ban

Much to our disappointment, the governor vetoed **Senate Bill 5179**, that would have largely overturned Initiative 713 and allowed the use of body-gripping traps for nuisance animals and wildlife population control. This is not just an issue of lawns and back-yard gardens. Livelihoods are at stake, particularly for cattle and sheep ranchers who have lost valuable livestock to predatory animals during calving and lambing seasons.



2003 Session Review and Survey Results

■ Higher Education

Three bills (co-sponsored by Rep. Cox) were adopted this session which have the potential of reforming higher education and the way it is funded.



- **House Bill 2111** – Establishes a task force to study the possibility of implementing performance contracts between the state and its colleges, universities and technical schools. In addition to examining the experience of other states, the panel will also determine whether implementing performance contracts in Washington would require changes in existing law. Inadequate resources and an increase in demand are hampering Washington's higher education system. The bill provides an opportunity for legislators and educators to work together to create a comprehensive approach in funding higher education. Performance contracts will help institutions be more successful in educating students and assure the state has a high-quality, cost-effective system.
- **House Bill 1909** – Authorizes a pilot project to define competency-based standards for students wishing to transfer from two-year higher education institutions to four-year colleges and universities. At least two community colleges or technical schools, a four-year institution and one private career college will participate in the project to develop standards (articulation agreements) for transfer students. These standards would be based on "defined student competencies." In other words, students will be evaluated by what they know, not how long they spend in the classroom.



- **House Bill 2076** – Clarifies and expands the role of the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) in developing a statewide strategic master plan that proposes a vision and identifies goals and priorities for higher education in Washington. The plan will also include specific strategies to maintain both affordability and access to higher education in the state.



Rep. Cox emphasizes a point during debate on the floor of the state House. The popular lawmaker serves as ranking Republican on the House Higher Education Committee.

Legislation introduced by Rep. Cox during the 2003 session

- **House Bill 1470** – Signed into law May 28, the bill allows children who live in a home that is located in Idaho but has a Washington address (assigned by the U.S. Postal Service) to attend school in Washington as resident students. The new law affects families living on the Idaho – Washington border in a community surrounded by a geographic horseshoe of mountains. The families own farmland in the area and pay taxes in both Idaho and Washington.
- **House Bill 1512** – Signed by the governor May 27, the measure allows special hunts to reduce crop damage caused by wildlife. When contacting people to help control game damage to crops, the Department of Fish and Wildlife must use a list of persons holding valid hunting licenses, and make all reasonable efforts to grant permits to residents of the county where the hunting will be allowed before contacting a resident of a different county. Names on the list must be randomized in order to provide a fair distribution of the hunting opportunities.

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**9th District
Constituent Survey Results**

Budget

We asked you to rank, in order of preference, solutions to fixing the state budget. This tally shows respondents' first choice.

- 61%** Reduce government waste
- 19%** Audit government agencies
- 9%** Raise taxes
- 7%** Cut government services
- 4%** Digitize government functions

Transportation

Did you vote for or against Referendum 51 (statewide transportation funding)?

- 34%** For
- 66%** Against

If you voted against it, why?

- 55%** Too much waste in the transportation system
- 22%** It cost too much
- 10%** It focused too much on transit
- 9%** It didn't provide enough money to fix transportation problems
- 4%** It focused too much on roads

How should the Legislature address the state's transportation problems?

- 39%** Send a modified plan to voters in 2003
- 38%** Find a new and different solution
- 20%** Pass modified plan without giving voters a final say
- 3%** Do nothing

Income tax

Are you in favor of creating a state income tax?

- 76%** No
- 23%** Yes

Higher Education

Should the state implement a long-term funding plan for our higher education system?

- 70%** Yes
- 30%** No

Which of the following best matches your opinion on raising tuition rates?

- 49%** Tuition increases are justified due to budget problems
- 51%** It isn't fair to increase tuition when the economy is so poor

State Parks

One solution to help save our state parks is to charge a parking fee to users. How much should the parking fee cost?

- 59%** Charge a minimal day-use fee and offer a yearly fee
- 14%** \$5
- 11%** Find another solution to pay for state parks
- 8%** No charge
- 6%** \$10
- 2%** \$15